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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LAGOS 000182

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STATE PASS NSC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL PM EPET ECON KDEM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CONSUL GENERAL MEETS WITH UNITED NIGER DELTA ENERGY, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY STRATEGY ORGANIZATION

REF: A. ABUJA 601
1B. ABUJA 493
1C. LAGOS 014
1D. 08 LAGOS 509

Classified By: Consul General Donna M. Blair for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (U) Summary: On March 17, Consul General met with Tony Uranta (protect), Executive Director for the new United Niger Delta Energy, Development and Security Strategy (UNDEDSS) organization. Uranta, who coordinated the 2007 African Democratic Congress (ADC) party presidential campaign of Patrick Utomi, head of the Lagos Business School's Center for Applied Economics, said UNDEDSS is a vehicle through which the numerous South-South ethnic groups, elders, youths and other civil society groups can speak with one voice. UNDEDSS is now planning a peace conference in Port Harcourt, on a date as yet undetermined, to establish the conditions for peace in the Niger Delta; the armed groups will participate, on the condition that there is international involvement in the conference. (Note: The peace conference is not related to the April economic summit planned by Utomi on behalf of the South-South governors. End Note) According to Uranta, UNDEDSS has commitments from high profile international actors such as Eli Wiesel and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to participate. Uranta told the Consul General that he hopes that the United States will attend the conference, if only in observer status, as well as consider partnering in some way such as helping build capacity for states and civil society. (Comment: UNDEDSS is a new organization and is making an effort to reach out to civil society in an effort to bring peace to and reduce suffering in the Niger Delta; they are thinking about how to provide an enabling environment to promote stability in that troubled region. This is the third time in as many weeks that either individuals or groups have reached out to discuss Niger Delta peace issues with the U.S. Mission. Utomi, who met with the Ambassador on March 23, UNDEDSS and the Ijaw Youth Council representatives who met with the Consul General on March 30 (Septel) have all indicated their frustration at failure of the GON to act. The new Minister of the Niger Delta Ministry told UK High Commissioner and Ambassador (Ref B) that amnesty will very much be on the table for in-house planning, but we have yet to see any tangible action. Meanwhile, as reported Ref A, President Yar'Adua mentioned the possibility of amnesty for militants in his discussions with PDP leaders. End Comment.) End Summary.

12. (C) At his request, United Niger Delta Energy,

Development Security Strategy (UNDEDSS) Executive Director Tony Uranta met March 17 with Consul General; Pol-Econ Chief was notetaker. Uranta ran the 2007 African Democratic Congress (ADC) party presidential campaign of Patrick Utomi, head of the Lagos Business School's Center for Applied Economics and former Volkswagen Nigeria executive Patrick Utomi. In introducing his association with Utomi, Uranta said Utomi knew he didn't have a prayer of winning the race, but both he and Uranta wanted to show the Nigerian people how a campaign could be focused on issues of public policy, rather than on the purely political and rent-seeking aspects that consume Nigerian political life. According to Uranta, Utomi's campaign resulted in an unusual indicium of success: President Yar'Adua based his Seven Point Agenda on Utomi's platform. Following the campaign, Uranta said, Utomi and he began to focus on the Niger Delta, which they see as the central issue in Nigeria.

Groups Unite S-S Civil Society, Elected Officials

¶13. (C) Until recently, the only means through which the Niger Delta could make itself heard, Uranta said, was guns and dynamite. Now, however, UNDEDSS unites and provides a voice for all of Niger Delta civil society, including the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ebibio and other ethnic groups that never before spoke with one voice (Ref C), Uranta said. In addition, on the government side, the South-South Economic Forum (SSEF), which began as an organization of the Governors of the states of the South-South geopolitical zone, now includes all the National Assembly members and State Assembly

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members from the states of the South-South geopolitical zone (Ref A); this greatly expands the group's potential political clout and provides a platform from which they can speak with one voice, Uranta said. When Afenefere, the socio-political organization for the Yoruba South-West geopolitical zone, or Ohanaeze, the socio-political organization for the Igbo South-East geopolitical zone, take a position on an issue, all parties and their elected officials in the zone base their actions on the socio-political group's ideas, Uranta claimed. UNDEDSS and SSEF will now play similar roles, uniting the South-South for the first time.

UNDEDSS Defeated Summit, Spurred Technical Committee

¶14. (C) Uranta claimed that he and Utomi and others involved in UNDEDSS organized the outcry against the poorly planned Niger Delta Summit last July. They also organized calls for creation of the Niger Delta Technical Committee, of which Uranta was a member, as a more effective vehicle for proposing reforms, he said. UNDEDSS members made substantial contributions to the work of the Technical Committee.

(Comment: Uranta has told Pol-Econ Chief in prior conversations that he is working on getting the Federal Government to issue a white paper outlining elements of the Technical Committee Report for implementation. End Comment)

UNDEDSS has been funded by private contributions of Niger Deltans with deep pockets, including Urhobo oil magnate Oscar Ibru, former Governor of Cross River State Donald Duke and Rivers State politician and oil executive Benson Lulu-Briggs.

Peace Conference Planned

¶15. (C) UNDEDSS is now planning an international peace conference (Note: Uranta said that the peace conference is entirely separate from the April South-South Economic Summit, planned for Tinapa in April. (Septel) End Note), to be held at an as yet undetermined time, that will bring everyone together to focus on resolution of the Niger Delta crisis, Uranta said. The armed groups have set a single condition for attendance, that is, that the international community also participates. Uranta has contacted Coventry Cathedral

Centre for Reconciliation, which has already issued a report (Septel) on "Potential for Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta." Uranta said that they engaged the Petra Conference of Nobel Laureates, through the intervention of Eli Wiesel. Through Bishop Desmond Tutu, Uranta claimed to have obtained the commitment of The Elders, the international group whose members include former President Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, Mary Robinson and Aung San Suu Kyi, to support the conference. According to Uranta, the Federal Government is the only entity that is balking, but Uranta hopes that other countries will use their good offices to make the Federal Government more interested in the conference. Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State has agreed that he will host the peace conference in Port Harcourt. Nobel Laureate in Literature Wole Soyinka, with whom Uranta has a long association and whom he calls "his mentor", will also participate in the conference once the Federal Government's participation is assured, Uranta said.

¶6. (C) On March 19, Uranta said, UNDEDSS will outline the peace conference concept to the Vice President and to the Minister of the Niger Delta (Note: During a March 23 meeting with Ambassador (Septel), Utomi said that former Cross Rivers Governor Donald Duke met with the President on March 19 to discuss amnesty and other elements involved in resolving the Niger Delta crisis. End Note.) Throughout April, other members of UNDEDSS, all chosen by the South-South Governors for this purpose, will meet with the heads of the security services and the military to get their buy-in. Uranta told the Consul General that he hopes that the United States will attend the conference, for which no date has as yet been fixed, if only in observer status, and entertain the possibility of partnering in some way, perhaps in helping build capacity for states and civil society. Consul General thanked Uranta for keeping the U.S. Mission informed of plans for and progress on the conference, and noted that security

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concerns make attendance at Port Harcourt events difficult. Nonetheless, the U.S. Government wants to be supportive of efforts to bring peace to the region.

Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, Amnesty

¶7. (C) If the youths in the Niger Delta are to drop their arms, there must first be a framework within which all militants can participate, Uranta said. There must be an agreement to grant amnesty, he said, and arrangements made so that youths can truly re integrate into society. (Note: In a March 16 meeting, the Minister of the Niger Delta Ministry told UK High Commissioner and Ambassador that amnesty and a program of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) were on the Ministry's agenda, but we have yet to see any tangible progress. End Note) After eight years in the creeks, with no solid education to begin with, armed youths are traumatized. They must be trained for some type of work which will allow them to leave militancy and earn a living. This was accomplished in South Africa, and in Sierra Leone, so these models can be replicated in Nigeria, he said. Finally, there must be a way to discriminate between true militants and youths who have never been armed. Otherwise, youths are so hungry for training and the prospect of a job that they will fake militancy just to be able to participate in the program. For example, Uranta said, there have been many people who have never been militant who have participated in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) funded training on Martin Luther King's principles of non-violence conducted by the Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria (FEHN.) The FEHN training can be useful, but it is operating outside a comprehensive framework, Uranta said.

DESOPADEC Model Must Spread to Other States

¶ 8. (C) Commenting on the comparative peace currently being experienced in Delta State, Uranta said that Delta State is quiet because Governor Uduaghan has taken the advice of the communities and established the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC), which receives 50 percent of the state's oil derivation for use in developing the state. In addition, the Governor appointed as the DESOPADEC head the "canny politician and grassroots operative" Chief Wellington Okirika, who "has not disappointed." "The people are involved in their own development, and are seeing more and more results every day," Uranta said. (Note: We have also heard that Governor Uduaghan has used an amount of his oil derivation to pay off senior militants to keep the peace, so all the funds are not going to development. End Note.) While UNDEDSS has tried to promote the DESOPADEC model in other states, Uranta said, only Edo and Ondo States currently have established oil-producing area development councils (OPADECS), both less successful than Delta State's OPADEC. Many Governors do not want their states to be secure; they have an interest in insecurity that stems from the enormous security funds they receive from the Federal Government, and, in many cases from their own direct or indirect involvement in the criminality of the region. Although Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi is a good friend of his, Uranta believes he has "wasted billions of naira" on a Truth and Reconciliation Committee which has never had reconciliation as its purpose. (Note: Many people believe that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has indicted former Rivers State Governor Peter Odili, was a thinly-veiled attempt by Governor Amaechi to reduce his predecessor's power and overall influence in the state. End Note) Moreover, Uranta claimed, trying to improve security by deploying the military has been counterproductive. "If people are cornered, they become desperate, and increasingly hostile", Uranta opined.

UNDEDSS To Begin Budget Monitoring

¶ 9. (C) UNDEDSS also wants to begin monitoring government budget processes to assure that monies for public purposes are well spent. By itself monitoring budgets, and encouraging other civil society groups to do the same,

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UNDEDSS will encourage the Governors to spend public funds wisely. (Note: UNDEDSS is seeking training in budget monitoring, Uranta told Pol-Econ Chief in an earlier conversation. End Note)

¶ 10. (C) Comment: We believe UNDEDSS and SSEF are new organizations led by individuals who appear to have no financial or other interests beyond a desire to bring peace to and reduce suffering in the Niger Delta. Uranta and Utomi are trying to address, in a systematic fashion, the fundamental barriers to peace in the Niger Delta. Uranta's claim to have coordinated efforts to derail last year's Niger Delta Summit along with his support for the formation of the Niger Delta Technical Committee is a believable one, based on the strikingly similar terms in which a range of Niger Deltans spoke out on these issues. We would note, however, that the Vice President's incompetence and the Yar'Adua government's overwhelming dysfunctionality also figured heavily in the failure of last year's Summit. The absence of a political framework for bringing about a real resolution of the problems of the Delta remains the biggest stumbling block in addressing the range of issues from development to security. Nonetheless, we will want to monitor UNDEDSS and SSEF viability and any tangible outcomes that might develop from these conferences. End Comment.

BLAIR